

## Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization Comments Requested

Vermont's congressional delegation has requested feedback regarding the Obama Administration's *Blueprint for Reform*, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Department has started a list of issues below and appreciates any additions and feedback you might offer. We have been working with our congressional delegates and other rural state commissioners to give small states a say in this process. Your voice at this time is important. It is our intent to provide as much useful information as possible on this topic as it becomes available. Read the blueprint at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html>.

Vermont Department of Education Feedback Thus Far:

Pros:

- Emphasis on more balanced approaches to assessment, including student growth models
- Potential for formula funding data systems and technology
- Emphasis on PK-16 connections and alignment
- Emphasis on preparation for 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond
- Integrating supports for using technology in teaching
- Potential to effectively braid funds rather than having numerous disparate funding sources that don't reinforce a clear purpose or vision
- Development of common core standards and related comprehensive assessment systems
- Support for schools and students that are really struggling to succeed

Cons/Suggestions:

- Small, low population states do not have capacity at the state or district level to participate in competitive grants for funding on a regular and routine basis.
- The competitive nature of the *Blueprint for Reform* has the potential to create a "Have and Have Not" disparity especially for children living in rural areas and flies in the face of Vermont's commitment to "Equal Educational Opportunity." Creating that capacity in economically strained environments means diverting necessary resources from providing the supports for improving instruction and learning outcomes to grant writing and compliance efforts.
- Rural nature makes four turnaround models difficult to implement.
- Recruit USED administrators with experience in rural states educational systems into key positions.
- Fund a Center for Providing Quality Education in Rural Communities staffed by individuals with leadership experience and expertise in developing high-quality educational systems in rural, low population communities, including small cities (under 50,000) and geographically disbursed population centers. This Center could serve as a resource to member states and in an advisory capacity to USED.
- Small state definition for funding opportunities must be inclusive enough to create political clout to be of significant influence and importance.
- Afford low population rural states (i.e., states with fewer than 200,000 student geographically disbursed with no large urban centers) ability to provide maximum flexibility on the local level. Within broad guidelines, allow these SEAs to act in a fashion not unlike what the Blueprint outlines as Flexibility For Success, meaning these states will be treated much as the schools not found within the lowest performing schools

list, that is to find their own way for: rigorous and fair accountability; meeting the needs of diverse learners; greater equality; effective school choice; and, promoting a culture of college readiness and success.

- In the verbiage that refers to “Linking Learning to Life”, achievement is only measured in attaining college. It is important that the law reflects success in many forms of applied learning where college is not the only goal for students.
- Because education is a civil right, setting up competition for critical funds used to support our most disadvantaged students creates inequity in funding and service distribution.
- Be clear about which funding streams are being moved and bundled and which are being removed entirely. For those being removed entirely, provide bridge programs in order to transition the infrastructure where possible.
- Under the Administration’s proposal, all SEAs will be required to maintain dual systems during the transition and will require significant funds to support that work and/or increased flexibility and relief from maintaining existing systems during the transition.
- This proposal is targeted toward urban, high-need districts with large concentrations of students in poverty and minorities. Low population rural states typically don’t have the concentrations necessary to meet requirements for many of the funding streams defined.
- Small state minimums must be reassessed and elevated in light of more complex data reporting and accountability requirements.
- Any and every requirement through reauthorization must provide administrative resources equivalent to the imposition of requirements to state agencies and schools.
- The Administration’s proposal drains all federal funds to students trying to maintain their level of proficiency (especially those students on the cusp).
- Vermont has students throughout our state who need services. Money must flow with sustainable funds available to students in all districts, not just those in high needs areas.
- Any reauthorization must promote innovation and flexibility.
- The funds that are now part of the “Titles” are sustainable and allow for consistent planning, co-mingling and transferring to best serve students.
- Treat health and safety education and physical education and related professionals with the same level of emphasis and priority as other curriculum areas.
- Create an Office of Coordinated School Health within the U.S. Department of Education and
- Provide adequate funding for Health Education.